



NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Karen Oby
North Dakota Department of Health
Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity
Phone: 701.328.2496
E-mail: koby@state.nd.us

Many North Dakota Sixth-Grade Students Are Overweight, According to Study

BISMARCK, N.D. – One out of every six North Dakota sixth-grade students is overweight, according to the results of a survey released today by the North Dakota Department of Health.

The term overweight when used to describe children indicates a child whose body mass index is greater than or equal to the 95th percentile for age.

The April 2002 survey was conducted by local public health nutritionists and nurses who collected the height and weight measurements of 827 sixth-grade students in more than 40 classrooms across the state. The survey showed the North Dakota rate of 16 percent overweight to be slightly higher than the national rate of 15 percent. In North Dakota, rural students were more likely to be overweight (19 percent) than students in urban areas (12 percent), and boys were more likely to be overweight (18 percent) than girls (14 percent).

“This study shows that North Dakota mirrors the nationwide epidemic of overweight children,” said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D. “We know that being overweight can affect a child’s health for his or her lifetime. All of us – parents, educators, caregivers and health professionals – must work together to help our children become fit and healthy.”

Being overweight is a risk factor for developing many chronic diseases in adulthood, including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis. Many overweight children and adolescents experience increased rates of high cholesterol, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. In addition, overweight children often are targets of discrimination and may develop negative self-images.

According to the Department of Health, the following steps can be taken to help reduce the risk of school-age students being overweight:

- Provide healthy, appealing foods – such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat grain products and low-fat dairy products – in school vending machines, a la carte lines, school stores and

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fundraising events, instead of sweetened soft drinks, candy and high-fat, high-sodium snack foods.

- Ban commercials for foods high in calories, fat or sugar on television programs broadcast to schools.
- Support daily physical education and school curriculums that promote lifelong healthy eating and physical activity, not just competitive sports.
- Participate in a school health or nutrition advisory committee to develop a strong school nutrition and physical activity policy.
- Advocate for convenient, safe and adequate places for young people to play and take part in physical activity programs throughout the community.

According to Dwelle, healthy weight is one of the issues being addressed by the state's *Healthy North Dakota* initiative. Partners from across North Dakota are collaborating on policies and programs designed to help reduce the incidence of obesity and overweight in children and adults.

"All of us can set a good example by being physically active every day and eating a healthy, balanced diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products," Dwelle said. "Doing so will help build a *Healthy North Dakota* for our children and ourselves."

For more information about the sixth-grade survey, contact Karen Oby, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2496. For information about the *Healthy North Dakota* initiative, contact Melissa Olson, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2372.

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